

It's As Plain As The Nose...

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Summary: A short vignette set around mid-second season, but definitely before The Phoenix; Lois is shocked to realise that Superman is showing distinct signs of of being short-sighted?

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It had been a long night, Lois thought as she flew in Superman's arms towards the large casement window of her apartment. She had heard about the explosion which had wrecked an old folks' home on the late news before going to bed, and had immediately hurried down there with her notebook and tape recorder. A photographer and duty reporter from the Planet were already there, so Lois had concerned herself with interviewing shocked residents as they waited, blankets wrapped around their shoulders, to be taken to temporary accommodation. Later, as dawn was breaking, she had interviewed fire officers and investigators as to the likely cause of the explosion.

While she had been thus engaged, Superman had of course been rescuing trapped residents, and later making the building safe for investigators to enter. He had then stayed to help with the investigation and had also brought out furniture and personal belongings from the crumbling building.

Finally, he had no longer been needed, and as the first golden streaks of light became visible across the dark, cloudless sky he had strolled across to where Lois was still standing making notes.

"I suppose you'll want an interview from me, too," he had observed dryly.

She had been about to respond with the kind of smart quip which was seeming to characterise their relationship these days, now that she was less star-struck than she had once been and was starting to see

him much more as a friend than as a hero on a pedestal. But as she'd glanced up at him, she'd seen the weariness and suffering in his eyes and her heart had gone out to him.

"It's okay, Superman, I think I have enough to go on without needing a quote from you," she'd assured him. "Anyway, I think I know you well enough by now that I could invent a convincing quote if I wanted one," she'd added, throwing him a teasing grin.

He had returned her smile. "Well, it wouldn't be the first time, Lois, would it? What was it now... something about truth and justice, if I remember right?"

She had laughed with him, remembering her first interview with him. It had been in the Planet's bullpen, late at night, and she had been so star-struck that she had barely been able to frame a coherent question, let alone conduct an interview. Strangely enough, thinking back, it had seemed as if he was equally nervous. That seemed odd...

Superman had then gestured at her notepad. "You about finished here, then?"

She had nodded. "Nothing much else to write up - I was just going to find a taxi." Seeing his look of surprise, she'd explained, "I didn't take the Jeep because I thought it'd probably be impossible to get parking anywhere near here, with all the emergency vehicles and everything."

"True," he had agreed. "So can I offer you a ride home, then?" he'd suggested, with that quirky smile she loved so much. Her heart had turned over; it really didn't help that she'd all but convinced herself that Superman was never likely to see her as anything more than a friend, and that she'd been thinking more often lately about Clark as a potential romantic partner. When Superman smiled at her like that, she felt like dissolving into a pool of mush at his feet.

< Keep your mind on the job and off his pecs!> she had instructed herself. Although that wasn't exactly easy when she was being held closely against him, the warmth of his body permeating through to her chilled bones. His muscle definition was very obvious at such close quarters, and was extremely appealing. It took all of her self-control to prevent herself running her fingers along his biceps as he flew them back to her apartment.

The exquisite torture ended as he set her down in the centre of her living-room, his hands sliding up her arms to her shoulders to steady her as she found her feet again. She assumed that he would leave again immediately, but as always she found herself searching for some way, some ruse, to keep him with her for just a few minutes. She so rarely got a chance to spend any time alone with him - *quality* time, not a snatched interview at some disaster scene, or a few short minutes as he rescued her from some danger or other.

She glanced up at him again; he hadn't yet moved. Again ruthlessly suppressing the desire to reach up and kiss him - that would guarantee his immediate departure, she felt sure - she found herself speaking.

"Uh... Superman, would you like some breakfast? You've been working hard all night..." She searched his face anxiously.

To her surprise, he didn't decline immediately. He hesitated, then said, "That's very kind, Lois, but you've been up all night too. Won't you want to get to - uh, get some sleep?"

"Oh!" Lois couldn't suppress the involuntary exclamation as she wondered whether his reply meant that he would actually like to stay. She hastened to reassure him. "There's really no point in going to bed now, Superman - I'd be getting up in an hour anyway to go to work, and with all this material to write up I might as well go in early. I'm going to have breakfast now anyway, so you're welcome to join me."

Superman moved forward, further away from the window. "Well, if you're sure, Lois...?"

"Sure I'm sure," she replied confidently. She studied him then; he really did look tired. She gestured towards her sofa. "Look, why don't you sit down and relax while I get on with fixing breakfast?"

Again, he hesitated, clearly unwilling to appear bad-mannered. "I couldn't do that - let me help, or at least come into the kitchen and talk to you."

She grinned at him, very happy now that she was going to have at least half an hour uninterrupted time with him - unless, that was, another emergency called him away. "Look, when it comes to the kitchen I work better alone, I promise you - Clark could certainly confirm that! And you can talk to me just as easily from here."

In the kitchen, she searched the refrigerator and cupboards for ingredients. Good: she could make scrambled eggs and toast, and there was plenty of coffee. Coffee first, she decided, throwing the occasional conversational remark across to Superman as she filled the machine with grounds and flicked the switch. His responses were little more than grunts, however, which disappointed her.

A few minutes later she had poured a cup of fresh coffee for him, and she carried it in to where he sat. Only he was no longer sitting; he was slumped in the corner of her sofa, his face resting against the throw-cushion which he had placed against the seat-back. He was fast asleep.

Silently, Lois placed the coffee on the low table and she sat carefully next to him on the sofa, not wanting to wake him but enjoying this rare opportunity to study him at close quarters. The tautness of his muscle definition, his broad shoulders, the firm jawline, the curve of his lips which, on one or two occasions in the past, had felt so wonderful moving over hers.

She forced herself to shift her gaze upwards. The straight shape of his nose, his perfectly-spaced eyes, the tiny oval indentations on either side of the bridge of his nose where...

Indentations?

What caused those sort of indentations....?

Lois frowned. The only thing she was aware of which could make that kind of mark on someone's face was... glasses. Spectacles.

She had never seen Superman wearing spectacles, but by the look of those marks on his nose, he had to wear them quite a lot. You have to wear glasses almost all the time to have those kind of permanent indentations, she thought, frowning. Heavy glasses, too - light frames, like sunglasses, wouldn't do it.

But why on earth would Superman need glasses? He was perfect in every way - and he had super-vision.

Lois puzzled over that for a moment, then her thoughts focused on trying to picture Superman wearing glasses. What on earth would he look like? She couldn't...

... quite...

She jumped to her feet as a realisation of earth-shattering significance struck her. For an instant, she could barely remember how to breathe.

The only person she could think of who wore glasses the whole time - heavy glasses, too - *and* who looked a lot like Superman...

... was Clark.

Clark Kent, her partner for the past eighteen months, best friend, and... potentially more.

As the shock died away, fury set in. She stood watching Clark sleep, seething inwardly, longing to seize one of her heaviest pans and clobber him over the head with it.

< Take that, Superman - Clark!>

The problem was that he wouldn't even feel it. Pulling a face, Lois briefly wished for some Kryptonite - just a tiny chip, just enough to render him vulnerable enough so that a karate-chop to the stomach would actually *hurt*.

Her desire for the instant gratification of waking him up to shout at him warred with the knowledge that revenge was best savoured when she had a proper *plan*. That's it, she determined. Work out the best way to extract revenge... and he'll really regret all the lies, the deceit, the...

The pretending that he was two different people, and making her fall in love with one of them, and being cruel enough to turn her down as Superman! If it hadn't been for that, Lois reflected bitterly, she would never have said yes to Lex.

But her conscience quickly pointed out that this wasn't entirely fair. She had decided of her own free will to marry Lex - and while she had sworn deep and abiding love to Superman, even assuring him that she would love him even if he was an ordinary man, she had rejected that very same ordinary man only a few hours earlier.

Lois pushed that uncomfortable memory aside. She wasn't yet willing

to give up her anger. That... that lying, deceitful *toad* asleep on her sofa deserved everything he had coming to him!

But first... she tiptoed into the kitchen and turned off the heat under the eggs, then poured herself some coffee as she brooded over possible courses of action. Frowning into her cup, she watched her guest surreptitiously over the rim: she could just see the top of his head over the sofa-back.

Just how fast asleep was he?

She tapped the egg-pan experimentally with a metal spoon; no reaction.

Okay, she thought with relish, she probably had enough time before he awoke... She hurried to her computer and booted it up...

Clark gradually came to wakefulness with the realisation that he was lying in a very uncomfortable position, on some object which was certainly not designed for sleeping. Blinking rapidly to clear the sleep from his eyes, he recognised the living-room of Lois's apartment.

What was he doing there? He couldn't immediately remember... but he was half-sitting, half-lying on her sofa. Well, that certainly explained his stiff neck. He'd lost count of the number of times he'd told Lois those sofas were instruments of torture. He massaged his neck-muscles as he tried to remember why he was at her apartment.

Glancing down at himself, he realised that he was in the Suit; he stretched back his hand, which had instinctively been about to grope for his glasses. He tried to concentrate...

Yes, that was it! He'd been helping at the old folks' home - he'd been there from about midnight, he remembered; and since he'd already been tired after rescuing an oil tanker in distress in the North Sea the night before, he really could have done with some sleep.

Lois had been there as well - outside the home, that was. He had caught sight of her on a number of occasions, bringing hot drinks to distressed elderly people as she tried to comfort and reassure them, under the guise of getting interviews for her story. Typical Lois, he mused with a wry smile. She liked to pretend that she was too hard-bitten to empathise with people's pain and suffering; but secretly she was incredibly compassionate.

And he had flown her home... yes, that was why he was here. She had no transport, and he just hadn't wanted to be alone, for some reason. She had invited him for breakfast, and he had accepted in the hope that talking to her about the night's events might help to ease some of the pictures which remained in his mind. Seriously injured and frail men and women who had been trapped inside the building and had begged him to help them; but worse, a building owner who cared so little about the injuries to the residents that he had actually tried to order Superman not to cause any more structural damage, even thought it had been necessary in order to free some of those who were

trapped.

Sometimes, man's inhumanity to man was impossible to believe.

Clark got to his feet... where was Lois? She wasn't in the kitchen, and from what he could see she appeared to have abandoned breakfast half-way through cooking it.

Then he noticed the sheet of paper on the floor by his feet. He picked it up and turned it over. To his surprise, it contained a print-out of the 'El' symbol from his suit. Puzzled, he placed it on the coffee-table and walked towards the kitchen.

On the table, next to a now-lukewarm cup of coffee, was another sheet of paper. This also bore the 'El' logo, but next to it was an outline of the State of Kansas. Written on the bottom of the page, in Lois's handwriting, were the words, "Am I getting close?"

Clark was now worried. Just what was she up to? He scanned the rest of the kitchen and living area with his supervision; there was another piece of paper on the floor, folded into an arrow-shape, just by her bedroom door.

Was the arrow telling him where Lois was? Was it suggesting that he should follow in the arrow's direction?

And if that was so, just what did Lois want? She couldn't be trying to... no, she wouldn't. He'd made it clear to her, as Superman, that he was backing off and just wanted to be friends.

He unfolded the arrow and stared at this third clue. Again, the 'El' symbol, but this time she had sketched a pair of glasses lying open over the 'S'.

Clark stilled. The meaning of this was unmistakable. He didn't even need the words underneath to realise what Lois was telling him. She had written, "Closer still, *see*?"

She knew. Lois had figured it out; how, he had absolutely no idea. Even more important, he had no idea how mad she was about it. Probably pretty furious, he guessed, judging by this elaborate charade. He knew Lois; if she had been just a little bit mad, she would have waited until he'd awoken and would have discussed it pretty aggressively with him. If she'd been *a lot* mad, she would have woken him up there and then and yelled at him.

For her to construct this kind of thing, she had to be furious at a rate of at least nine and a half out of ten on the Lane scale. Ballistic, in fact. Screamingly enraged.

He blinked, and drew a long breath as he mentally prepared himself for the embodiment of Mad Dog Lane who was clearly awaiting him on the other side of her bedroom door. Slowly, he pushed open the door.

Lois sat cross-legged on her bed, wearing... he gulped. She was wearing a semi-transparent robe, with very little underneath, from what he could tell. He suspected that her choice of apparel was a deliberate attempt to unnerve him, and despite his best efforts it was working. He tried to avoid looking at her, but it was difficult;

given that he was expecting her to be angry, he couldn't very well take his eyes off her. That would be a bad move, strategically speaking.

She was reading something, and appeared not to have noticed his entry into her bedroom. However, Clark knew that she was very well aware of him; her pulse rate had increased by several points since he'd come in. He noticed an infinitesimal flick of her eye in his direction, a movement no-one without super-powers would have caught.

So, she was waiting for him to make the first move, was she? He smiled suddenly; he was pretty good at these games of patience, and he usually knew just how to psych someone out.

He crossed his arms in front of his chest in his distinctive Superman pose, and fixed her with a basilisk stare.

After a few moments, she casually raised her gaze from the papers she was studying, and appeared to notice him for the first time.

"Superman - did you want something?"

"I thought you did, Lois - you seemed to be inviting me in here," he replied blandly, deciding that his best course of action would be to try to force her onto the defensive.

She held out the papers towards him. "You might like to take a look at this." At his raised eyebrow of enquiry, she explained, "I wrote up my story while you were asleep."

He stepped forward and grasped the paper; it was laid out in the typical format of a Lane story for the Planet, with the subject-matter and suggested headline at the top.

SUBJECT: PLANET EXCLUSIVE ON SUPERMAN HEAD: PLANET REPORTER IS MAN OF STEEL SUB-HEAD: HOW GLASSES GAVE AWAY KENT'S SECRET

Clark barely bothered to read the remainder of the typed sheets, instead striding towards Lois and allowing the pages to flutter onto the bed.

"You can *not* be seriously considering printing that!" he exclaimed angrily.

She fixed him with a wide-eyed stare. "Why, Superman, you know I'm an investigative reporter! And as you told me once, that means I should *investigate*! And it's my job to write the truth, isn't it?"

"Look, Lois, I don't know what it is you think you know..." he began, only to trail off as she unfolded her nearly-bare legs and got to her feet. He swallowed.

"What's the problem, Superman?" she enquired in a pseudo-innocent voice. "You can't possibly have a problem with the way I'm dressed - after all, you told me once that it didn't matter what I wore if I didn't have a lead-lined robe."

Clark flinched. "Lois, I am *sorry* I ever said that. I wanted to

take it back the second - "

"Yes, I suppose you did," she interrupted him. "It's funny - I could never imagine Clark saying anything quite that crude to me."

< You hurt Clark that day...> he wanted to hit back at her, but swallowed the words before they could form on his tongue. "Lois, what is this all about?"

She dropped the innocent air suddenly, her tone becoming cold. "You know very well, Clark Kent. I've found out your little secret. And I can assure you, you are *not* my favourite person right now, so don't even think about trying to lie your way out of this."

Clark sighed; she was right, there was no point in hoping that he could somehow persuade her that she was mistaken. Taking another deep breath, he said heavily, "Yes, you're right. I am Clark." He gestured at the sheets of paper on the bed. "You haven't already emailed that to the Planet, have you?"

She glared at him. "Clark, how long have we been partners?"

He shook his head at this sudden apparent non-sequitur. "Over a year - why?"

"Well, presumably that means you know how I operate by now?"

< Yes> he thought. < You never sit on a story; you always have to make sure no-one scoops you, you have to be in there first with the exclusive...>

Wait a minute.... He met her gaze, realising all at once what she was trying to tell him, and in addition, just why she was so angry.

He spoke in a low, intense voice. "Lois, what I've learnt about you is that you are the most brilliant reporter in Metropolis. But you are also the most loyal and generous friend I could ever hope to have. You have saved my life and my sanity more than I care to remember, and I would trust you with my life and all that is precious to me."

She met his gaze, unblinking, though he thought he saw the glimmer of tears in her eyes.

"Lois, you think I didn't tell you I'm really Clark because I don't trust you, isn't that it?" he asked huskily.

She shrugged. "If the cap fits...." She turned away from him. "It's not as though you haven't had *lots* of opportunities... I mean, all those ridiculous excuses and explanations, and you even let me believe you'd been killed!"

Clark took the few steps which separated them, gripping her firmly by her shoulders. "You're right, I should have told you then, and I'm sorry for hurting you. If it's any consolation, I was in a hell of a state myself."

She broke free of his grasp and spun around to face him. "And I haven't sent that story to Perry - I wasn't going to."

"I know you weren't, Lois," he assured her. "I told you, I trust you. I'm just so used to keeping this to myself - other than you, only my parents know."

She reached out and touched the front of his suit cautiously. "I feel I don't know you any more."

Clark stepped back, then spun into the casual clothes he had been wearing at his apartment before he'd been called out. Lois gasped, but he strode forward again swiftly and took her lightly in his arms.

"Lois, I know we need to talk, and we **will** talk, when we have time to do it properly - not when we have to be in work in an hour. But for now **I** need to know that you're still my best friend."

"Really?" Her tone was sceptical. "You've been distancing yourself from me for a while."

"Only as Superman," he replied seriously. "I always wanted to be free to care about you, as myself."

"You told me you loved me, and then you took it back," she accused him.

Clark grimaced; he felt it was a bit soon for that particular discussion. "Why don't we save that one until later, too?" Deciding to change the subject, he asked, "Please, tell me how you figured it out. Did I talk in my sleep or something?"

He was taken aback when she reached forward and removed his glasses; at first, he thought she simply wanted to see Clark without the barrier of glasses. But she moved out of his grasp and took his arm, drawing him towards her dressing-table.

"Look in the mirror -look closely at the sides of your nose, by the bridge. Do you see anything?" she asked.

Clark looked. And stared as he realised just what she was getting at. He turned to stare at her in open admiration.

"Lois Lane, you have got to be the best investigative reporter this century! I can't imagine anyone else seeing that and figuring it out..." He shook his head. "I gotta do something about that..."

She touched his arm gently. "Not many people get that close to you as Superman, I guess. And if you want to make sure, maybe you should get some new glasses - with lighter frames, so they don't leave marks."

He met her gaze, his lips curling into a gentle smile; his hand reached up almost of its own volition to curve around her cheek and into her hair. "That's a pretty neat idea, Lois. You know, I really don't know what Superman would have done without you sometimes."

"I guess even Superheroes need a friend," she suggested.

"You **know** Superheroes need a friend," he replied. "The one I know has pretty specific requirements for the job, though... she's got to

be beautiful, and funny, and generous and loyal, and intelligent, and a little crazy... and," he finished on a husky note, "she has to be called Lois Lane."

She moved a little closer to him; he could feel her body heat, smell the scent of her skin, her hair. He wanted to wrap his arms around her, hold her tightly to him, but he wasn't sure whether she would permit that.

She tilted her face up towards his. "That sounds like a job I'd be interested in. But only if it's understood that I also get to be friends with Clark Kent."

"That condition isn't a problem," he assured her huskily.

"Okay... and as long as I get to have plenty of hugs, and maybe even a few kisses as part of the reward package," she whispered, smiling provocatively.

"That could be arranged, I guess," Clark replied, now grinning broadly in return. He lowered his head and brushed his lips across hers. "Consider that an advance."

A few light kisses and several hugs later, Clark raised his head but still held her gaze. "You know, Lois, when I saw those pictures I really thought you were furious with me. I imagine you plotting all sorts of horrible revenge on me."

"Don't imagine I wasn't, Kent!" she assured him firmly. "I have a present for you." She freed herself from his arms, disappearing into her bathroom. She re-emerged a few moments later wrapped in a thicker robe and clearly holding something behind her back.

She held out the mystery object to Clark; he accepted it and stared down at... a vaguely familiar Godzilla toy. He recognised it; it had once worn a short cape and an 'S' logo on its chest. Now the logo and cape were gone, and the Godzilla wore paper spectacles and a tie.

As he raised his gaze from the toy to Lois, she fixed him with a challenging stare. "I had intended hiding that just outside my window - you'd have seen it as soon as you flew out."

He nodded; he would have. And the significance would have dawned on him immediately. "And I suppose you'd have said nothing, just waited for me to come into work and watched to see how I'd behave?" he enquired.

"Sure. I figured it wouldn't take too long for you to be desperate to know how much I knew."

"So why the drawings instead?" he enquired.

She shrugged. "I decided it would be better to have this out here - in private. Besides, I wanted to watch you squirm, and it's not very easy to do that at the Planet - not as much as I wanted you to squirm, anyway."

He grinned ruefully. "So did I squirm enough for you, Lois?"

"I guess so," she said thoughtfully. "Though I might have to make you squirm a little more still - I could make you take me to Smallville so I can ask Martha all about when you first started to see through things."

He pretended to recoil. "Lois, I'll grovel... anything but have you and Mom talking about me as a kid!"

"Should have thought of that sooner, Farmboy.... Now, I think you owe me breakfast!" she retorted.

"Yeah, I guess I do - croissants? Pastries?" He was gone in a blur before she had a chance to answer, and she shook her head in bemusement before heading for the shower. At a guess, he'd gone to France for authentic pastries... anything to impress her and ensure that she would forgive him. Of course, she had forgiven him already, but, she mused, there was no harm in letting him grovel just a little bit longer.

He deserved it, after all. And since hitting him over the head wouldn't hurt him, she would just have to try more subtle tactics. It was a good thing Clark was often quite slow to see that he was being manipulated, she thought with a wicked grin as she dressed. This was going to be fun....

----The End----

- Postscript -

I have absolutely no idea whether spectacles would leave the same imprint on Clark's face as they do on mine! This is just a fun 'what-if' story, not by any means to be taken seriously.

End
file.